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A Single Decision (Take Two)

By: Timewatch (/u/1698214/Timewatch)  (https://www.fanfiction.net/pm2/post.php?uid=1698214)

Aboard Invisible Hand, on that fateful day above Coruscant, Grievous makes a choice that causes a few little changes for the Separatists and Republic alike. [rewrite of a much older story]

Rated: Fiction T (https://www.fictionratings.com/) - English - Sci-Fi/Friendship - General Grievous, OC - Chapters: 53 - Words: 542,002 - Reviews: 1,397 (/r/11714223/) - Favs: 1,321 - Follows: 1,431 - Updated: Aug 19, 2022 - Published: Jan 4, 2016 - id: 11714223

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Author's note: Haha, you honestly didn't think I'd manage more than two posts in a year, did you? Go read the previous chapters again (starting from 8), it's been a while.

Chapter 14

The whistling hum of ion thrusters filled the air as the Raxus Air Guard launched, to take back the skies of their city from the traitors. Grievous watched from the shadows, before turning to his remaining band.

"This will all be over soon," he said to them, pacing back and forth, damaged knee joint grinding and screeching with every movement. Three of his fingers on one hand hung limply, receiving input from neither nervous system nor circuit. "My agent and I are heading to the array next, to reactivate the planetary droid army. We will travel faster alone, so the rest of you will maintain position here and make it seem this is where I am making my stand."

The police force, or what was left of it, nodded. Grievous wondered how many of these men and women had been perfectly ordinary people until today. Civilian constables or not, they had gone above and beyond their call of duty. Were they truly that dedicated to the Confederate cause? Were they only following him for lack of any other option? The cyborg could not say. A long time ago, men had thrown away their lives on his command. But that was a long time ago. Another life.

"Bring me a white sheet and paint," he ordered. As this was a barracks building, the sheet was easily found, but all they had to draw with was some kind of lubricating oil. At least it was black. Grievous fashioned a brush out of a rag and hastily smeared his emblem onto the white sheet. No doubt someone would recognize it as the one on the back of all his capes. "You will fly this flag above this building. Whoever comes for you, fight them. I will not ask that you fight to the end, but only enough to delay them. By the time they realize I am not here, it will be too late."

"What about the prisoners, sir?"

"Bind them and leave them in a room somewhere." *If I survive, and I will*, Grievous thought, *these Nemoïdians would be useful to have around*.

With his instructions given, it was time to leave. He took the Jedi girl back through the underground passage and to the train station. "So... the array?" asked the girl.

"As close to it as we can get."

The girl studied the transit map on the station wall. "We'll need to go to the Sirion district," she declared.

"Is the array there?"

"No, but there's an expressway on the surface for speeders. It's out in the open but that shouldn't be a problem now that we've got air cover." She paused, making a face. "We, that sounds so weird."

And it did, that was true enough. "Are the Jedi in the business of stealing speeders?" asked Grievous.

"It's not approved of but we all know how to do it," sighed the girl. "Sometimes you just need something that can move. Master Kenobi and Skywalker stole a senator's speeder once, to chase down an assassin."

Grievous rolled his eyes. It always came back to those two. At least one was permanently dealt with now. "Stop wasting time, get moving," he told the girl.

"But you're the one who-"

"Enough." The edge in his voice was somewhat marred by the coughing fit he collapsed into for a few moments. Once it had passed, Grievous straightened back up and got on the train, pushing the girl ahead of him.

Without further objection, the girl got the train moving to the Sirion district. He didn't want to admit it, but he was becoming more reliant on her help with every bit of damage he took. The reflection of the cyborg in the window was not one that spoke of power or danger. Grievous looked like he'd been put through a flour mill's grindstones. *Flour*, he thought, *that's something I haven't heard of in years*. When was the last time food had even been on his mind?

"Do they have flour, where you're from?" he found himself asking the Jedi girl.

She turned around in the conductor's seat, eyes wide in confusion. "Uh... what's flour?"

"Never mind."

"Okay..." Her voice was not confident at all.

Grievous didn't even know why he'd asked that. A very strange memory came to him: he was mixing flour and water in a wooden bowl, with his own two hands of flesh. Two other hands were helping, much smaller ones. He'd been a father, once. The feared General Grievous, a father!

The revelation was enough to make him sit down.

"Second thoughts about this?" asked the girl.

"Absolutely not," he growled. Did he really have a family once? Were they even alive? Did they know what he had become? Would they have cared? A better question: did *he* care if they did or not?

"I wonder the same thing, sometimes," the girl said.

"What?" Grievous turned to glare at her. She sat up, and looked over.

"Oh, wow, I actually heard your thoughts. That's never actually happened before, with anyone. You didn't actually say anything?" The girl looked very surprised, and not at all bothered that she'd just read his mind.

"Stay out of my head," Grievous ordered, "or I'll kill you."

"Hey, I'm not in your head!" she answered. "You're sitting there broadcasting what's on your mind at maximum volume. Didn't Dooku train you to shield your thoughts?"

"Perhaps," muttered Grievous. Yes, he actually had. Grievous had constantly shielded his mind from Force users, before the incident on *Invisible Hand*. All this fighting was starting to wear him down. This was new.

"But it's true," the girl went on. "I wonder what my family thinks of me. Being a Jedi and all."

"I hope they're ashamed," Grievous said. "I would be ashamed for any of my people to become a Jedi. In fact, I would kill any of them who became Jedi."

"...you say, while sitting two meters from one." The girl tilted her head. "Maybe I should take my lightsaber back."

"Just you try-" Grievous threatened, but the hilt went flying out of his hand and into the girl's.

"Do or do not, there is no try," she said. "That's a Master Yoda line, by the way."

There was too much going on in his mind for him to get angry. He disdained the little green Jedi; that coward had hid in their precious Temple for the whole war. What was he but some aged cleric? Grievous would pay him no heed.

"You really shouldn't think lightly of Master Yoda," said the girl.

"Stop it!" growled Grievous.

"*You* stop it!" the girl shot back. "You're like a holotank that won't turn off!"

"How long have you been listening to my thoughts?" Grievous asked, standing up and looming over the girl. She only seemed mildly intimidated.

"Look, they've been getting clearer all day. I've not even been hearing your actual thoughts, just... enough to get the picture." The girl paused. "It only *really* started just back there, in the courtyard."

Of course, Grievous thought. *One moment of sympathy to a Jedi and she's already reading my mind. No wonder they're such manipulators! I won't get fooled by you again, girl.*

"Don't get angry at me, you said Dooku trained you how to close off your mind. Just do it, I'm not going to try to break in. That's a Sith thing, they said." She turned away in her seat, and looked ahead out the train window.

Grievous sank back into his own chair, and forced himself to calm down. Just as Dooku had taught him, he brought up a wall between him and everything else, as if a karabbac lurked in the darkness beyond his own spirit. Focus was key, focus and calm. Unfortunately Grievous was not great at the latter requirement. That might be why he'd lost so many fights against the Jedi.

"Much better," remarked the girl. "I was almost starting to think you were a person, not a monster."

"Keep it that way," Grievous told her.

Onward the train sped, to Sirion district, whatever that was. So far, Grievous had been improvising everything, acting on every opportunity he saw. What did the array even look like? Would it be hard to get in? Were there back doors he could use? *This is suicidal if they're expecting us*, Grievous thought. And they might be. The policeman had told him the traitors had the array on lock-down, they'd already made an attempt to take it. If they couldn't, what hope did a wounded cyborg and a Jedi without a lightsaber have? *There's no other option, it's victory or martyrdom*, he thought.

They would take the array, or die in the attempt.

"We're coming up on Sirion," said the girl. "Do you have a plan?"

"Hit them hard and hit them fast," Grievous told her. "Never stop moving."

"That seems vague," the girl said.

"There's no point in planning if we don't even know what we're up against or where we'll be fighting," Grievous said, waving a hand. "We will improvise and use our superior mobility."

"It'd help if we were better armed." The girl looked disdainfully at her blaster.

Grievous had fought this entire war with substandard equipment and droids, whose numbers didn't even make up for their incompetence. Now this Jedi dared complain the odds were against her for the first time? He rolled his eyes, not even bothering to make a remark.

The train slowed to a stop, smoother than before. This station was empty. Grievous bounded right for the escalator to the surface, but the Jedi girl had something else in mind.

"Don't do that," she said, raising a hand. "I sense a hostile presence. Here, this way." The girl darted back into the tunnel, along the service catwalk. Grievous clanked and screeched after her. The gods must have been on his side, for the enemy not to hear him. "Go up through here, and we'll be behind them," said the girl, offering him her lightsaber. "I *will* have this back again."

"I wouldn't dream of keeping it," Grievous muttered, beginning his climb up a narrow stairway. "How do you know this even leads to the surface?"

"Intuition."

I bet she's using that Force of hers, Grievous thought. His internal gyroscopes told him they were going up, they were on stairs after all, but they could lead anywhere. But finally, they came to a door.

"This is it," the girl said from behind him. "Open that and you'll be on the street behind them. Make it count."

Grievous quietly unlatched the door, and peeked out. A whole platoon of Koorivar was waiting, heavy weapons and all, pointing at the entrance to the undertram. He'd never make it to them without them hearing his approach, damaged as he was. *A detonator, a detonator*, Grievous lamented, *my army for a detonator!*

So he used the next best thing: himself. Grievous catapulted into the air, and fell in among the Koorivar before they'd even known what hit them.

Esera could only watch from the shadows as the cyborg completed his butchery. *It has to be this way*, she thought. *It's them or... us. Us. How did it come to this?* Well, she knew damn well how it came to this. The events that had lead her here had only started a week ago. *A week!*

While Grievous did what Grievous did best, Esera found them a speeder for the final run. Anything would do, as long as it wasn't some mom-speeder for hauling children to sports practice. They had those on planets besides Coruscant, right? They had to.

"They knew we were coming," Grievous said, flicking gore off his talons.

"Or maybe they were just being cautious," said Esera. "If you were loose in the undertram and I was trying to kill you, I'd just put squads of clones at every station exit."

Grievous snorted, or made an approximation of a snort at least, and limped over to the speeder she'd found. How that beast managed to keep fighting despite all the damage he'd taken today was astounding.

"Do you know where the array is from here?" Grievous asked, hunching over his huge metal frame to fit in the little vehicle.

"...Yes," Esera said, as she found a holomap of the city on the speeder's computer. She set it to three-dimensional mode, and frowned. "It's got a wall."

"So?" Grievous asked.

"This isn't a tank, we can't drive through a wall."

"We can fly over it," said the cyborg.

"No, we can't," Esera said. "Stay here, I'm going to go check it out from above."

"Jedi... always on the move," Grievous muttered.

She stepped out of the speeder, and used the Force to boost her jump onto the fire escape of the building near them. Esera rushed to the top, and looked out over to the array. A wall surrounded a tall tower, which had a few adjacent buildings at its base. With only her eyes, she couldn't see if the place was defended, but it was safe to assume it was. *How do we get in besides flying, though?* Maybe they'd just have to drive up to the wall and climb it. Or crash the car into the gates and hope for the best. No wonder Grievous didn't have a plan, they'd be just as screwed with one as they were without one!

Esera descended, but found Grievous had taken her spot in the driver's seat.

"Get in, Jedi," Grievous said. "I know how to get in there."

"What?" asked Esera, strapping herself into the passenger seat. "Where? I didn't see anything."

"You Jedi are so blind," said Grievous. He tapped the holomap, finger on a yellow triangle. "Look."

"It's construction, what about it?"

"Idiot! It's construction on the elevated tracks! The undertram goes above surface over here!"

Esera blinked, and stared at the map. "Well," she said, "I guess I didn't notice. I took a skybus to the congress building before. Or Miss Lirka's speeder."

"I don't care," said Grievous. "We're taking the tram tracks in."

"They go into the array?"

Talking time was over with Grievous. He floored the accelerator, and the little speeder took off. Grievous did not drive safely; he drifted around every corner and braked for nothing. Esera found herself gripping the handhold in the door for dear life as Grievous swerved and smashed his way up the stairway of a train stop, and onto the platform. *I hope the owner has insurance*, Esera thought.

"What exactly are you going to do?" she asked, eyeing the rapidly-approaching wall of the array facility.

"We're going to fly," said Grievous, giving her a tired glare even as they hurtled along at hundreds of kilometers an hour over a train track with no guard rails.

"Eyes ahead!" hissed Esera.

"Women are the same everywhere," Grievous scoffed.

"What do you know about women, you alien robot!?" Esera almost screeched as they drifted very close to the edge of the track.

"You're the alien to me," said Grievous. "Look, there's our way in."

"*That!?*" Esera really did screech this time. They were headed straight for a ramp! The tracks split and one curved away on a flat plane, the other went straight on and began to climb. Flashing yellow holograms informed anyone approaching it wasn't smart to go up the unfinished track.

"Yes," said Grievous. "I deleted the speed governor software while you were out, by the way. We should be able to make it."

Should!?

The speeder's engine roared as it pumped more fuel into the thrusters, and they smashed through the barriers at the foot of the ramp. Why was this ramp even here? Esera checked the map, just to get her eyes off the sky they were headed for. *Oh*, she thought, *there's a water treatment plant in the way*. If they crashed, they'd die in filthy wastewater. *Wouldn't that be fitting?*

To Esera's horror and surprise, there was more track at the top of the ramp. And there, beyond the treatment plant, was the wall of the array, just to their right, across a hundred meters of empty air. Grievous's eyes were fixed on it.

"I don't think this is a good idea, Grievous-!" Esera's words turned into a scream as the cyborg yanked on the tiller and sent the speeder soaring across the gulf. Grievous cackled as they flew, but had fallen into coughing before the speeder was even at the wall. They flew across it with only meters to spare, and crashed straight onto the roof of one of the auxiliary buildings. The speeder skidded across the surface and spun around until it slammed into a ventilator.

"Go!" shouted Grievous, as he kicked the driver's door off its hinges, sending it flying over the edge of the roof. Esera unbuckled her restraints and followed him, knees weak and palms sweaty from their impromptu flight.

"You're insane!" she gasped as they ran to the other end of the building. Alarms were sounding across the facility, and below Esera saw figures rushing towards the building they'd landed on. "If you hadn't made it, we'd both be dead!"

"Yes, we would, and we still might die by the end of this!" said Grievous. He pointed his arm at the tower; the dozen meters between them and it seemed small compared to the gap they'd just jumped. From his arm shot a grappling hook and cable.

"You can do that?" Esera asked faintly.

"Yes," snapped Grievous. "Come here."

"What?" Instead of answering, Grievous just grabbed her around the waist, and jumped. This time, Esera managed to restrict herself to a yelp of alarm as they swung across the space. Grievous used his legs to brake their fall, which might have worked well on another day. But after all the damage he'd taken, his bad knee crumpled the moment it hit the tower wall.

"Wonderful," Grievous growled. With one arm and one working leg, he pulled himself and Esera up until they reached a window, which he cut through with her lightsaber. He tossed her through without grace, but she landed on her feet like a good Jedi ought to.

"Where are we going?" Esera asked, trying not to think about how she'd just been carried up a cable by Jedi enemy number one. *Like how I helped Lirka, who hates Jedi*, she thought. That'd only been this morning, and it already felt like a lifetime ago.

"I do not know," Grievous muttered. He looked around the empty hall, his mechanical ears twitching. "That way," he said, pointing the only direction they could go. The alarms were sounding inside the building too, and every door was locked. Grievous just sliced through them with Esera's lightsaber, leaving a very obvious trail of destruction in their wake. Esera kept her mind open to the Force, and hoped it was guiding her where she needed to go.

However, Grievous was having trouble keeping up. The cyborg did not get tired, but he was operating on one leg, almost hopping, as he dragged his other bad leg behind him. His simply stuck his claws into the wall for support, leaving even more property damage behind him. *There's no way he's going to be able to fight like that*, Esera thought. *Hell, even I could defeat him like this*.

A few floors up, and Esera saw signs they must have been close to what they were searching for. Red-marked OOM-series battle droids – security guards. Of course, they were all standing with their heads drooped, and some had fallen over. Like all the other droids, they were shut down.

"It's close," Grievous said. "There's a lot of power in the conduits up here."

"You can see that?"

"They're hardly showing up on my thermal scanners, they must be very well-insulated."

"Right... Or maybe they're just low-power..." said Esera. She watched as Grievous followed the conduit embedded in the wall, until they came to a heavy blast door.

"This must be it," he said.

"Hold on, before you start cutting through here, do you have any idea of what might be on the other side?" Esera asked. Grievous stared at her for a moment, twitching his hand that held her lightsaber.

"No," he said. "But they're already dead if they choose to fight me."

"Uh, you've noticed you can barely walk, right?"

"I can fight without walking."

Esera sighed. "If you die, I die too, and I'm really interested in not dying."

"Too bad," Grievous said. He switched on her lightsaber, and stabbed it into the blast door. Esera's fingers tightened on the grip of her blaster, and she watched the hall as Grievous cut his way into what could only be the core of the tower. *Hopefully, it's the core.*

In the Force, Esera could sense the presence of others all around them. But she saw no one. When she told Grievous this, he didn't seem bothered. "If we're walking into a trap, then our only choice is to spring it," he told her. "We are beyond the point of no return."

"Alright, then," said Esera. She breathed in deeply, and tried to steel herself for what was to come.

"There was a saying on my world, that the priests told us before we fought the huk," Grievous said. "Victory is heaven's promise to the righteous!" He pulled her lightsaber out of the door, and kicked open the hole he'd cut with his bad leg.

If that's true, we're doomed, thought Esera. There wasn't a righteous thought in that monster's head. Was there?

Grievous crashed through the hole in the door, splitting his arms in four, and swinging the girl's saber in the expectation there'd be a foe to meet. But his adjusted eyes saw nothing. All that he found was an empty control room, aside from the powered-down droids.

"I'm almost disappointed," he said. He'd hyped himself up for nothing! "These corporate forces aren't as good as they seemed to be, if they didn't expect this-"

"Don't waste time gloating or monologue-ing! Turn the droids back on!" the girl said, climbing through the hole right behind him.

She's right, he thought. Grievous hobbled to the main terminal. He re-activated the planet's communications grid, and took a look at what was happening in the system. *Invisible Hand* had been chased to the outer planets, but was fighting on. Admiral Tuuk's flagship, which should have been at Kashyyyk, was now in orbit. *You too, Tuuk?* he wondered. He very much hoped Tuuk wasn't part of this conspiracy, he was too good of an officer to lose. But with him were all the corporate fleets, except the Techno Union's.

"Excellent," Grievous said, "I'll catch them all at once!"

"Turn the droids on!" the girl repeated through grit teeth.

Grievous accessed the droid army's mainframe, and gave the activation order. The order went through, and-

Nothing happened. The droids stayed deactivated.

"What?" Grievous growled. He entered the command again, and again, and mashed the button so hard it cracked. The droids did nothing. "Get up!" Grievous yelled at them. "Come alive!"

"We're dead," the girl sighed. "There's movement in the hall, we're going to have company."

Grievous roared in frustration, and slammed his fists into the terminal, leaving deep dents in the metal surface. *It's not fair!* he thought. *We were so close!* The only thing left to do was die, now. And if he was to die, he would die in glorious battle. *I will join my brothers in martyrdom, and meet them again in paradise.* Or so the priests had told them, all those years ago when he he'd first begun his fight. Did he believe any of that now? Would his soul be lifted by the gods into the undying lands that awaited those who perished in battle against their enemies? Or would he only meet destruction the moment the last spark of life left his body?

I don't particularly care, Grievous thought. He lifted the girl's lightsaber, and stood ready. "Stay or go, Jedi," he said. "But this is where I make my stand."

"Like I could get out of here alive. Besides, you've got my weapon," the girl said. She took cover behind a control panel. "This is the second time in a day I've been sure I'm going to die. I think I'm getting used to it." The girl smiled, but it wasn't a happy smile. "It's funny, you know. I'm only here because I'm paying back Lirka's friendship. Who would have thought it'd get me killed? No good deed goes unpunished, I guess."

"Would you have lived with yourself if she'd died in your place?" Grievous asked. Was Lirka that Sephi girl she'd been with yesterday?

The girl sighed again. "No," she said.

"You're sentimental," said Grievous. "You let your heart command your will. That is weakness. You could have escaped and lived if you weren't a slave to your sentiments. You are a fool, Jedi."

"Thanks," the girl muttered.

"Are you afraid to die?" he asked.

"Yes," said the girl. Even if she'd lied, Grievous could tell she was. Her heart was racing, there was sweat on her brow, her hands trembled.

"Jedi shouldn't feel fear."

"And Jedi should feel death, but here I am," the girl said. "I'll die as I lived, trying to do what's right."

"Sentimental, but courageous. I commend your conviction." Grievous leaned forward on his good leg, ready to jump. He heard footsteps outside, and the setting of blasters to full power. "As far as Jedi go, you were the one I hated the least."

The girl only laughed grimly, and that was a good exchange to end on, for Grievous. How many of his friends had gone off to die after one final light-hearted remark? He could name no names, but he remembered them all the same.

The Koorivar came in with handheld shield generators. The Jedi noticed immediately and held her fire, and Grievous stood still. And who followed them in, but a familiar face? A familiar face, scarred and hastily-rebuilt after a near-death incident two years ago.

"General Oro Dassyne," Grievous said, standing straighter. The broken-horned Koorivar only nodded, and his right eye twitched. Both were even bluer than the originals.

"It's colonel, now," Dassyne said, gloved hands clasped together. "You demoted me, don't you remember?"

"You lost Boomis Koori to Kenobi and Skywalker. I told you they weren't to be underestimated!" Grievous clenched his free fist.

"Oh, I don't blame you, General," said Dassyne. "My overconfidence was my weakness. I needed the lesson in humility."

"Was this your operation?" asked Grievous.

"Most of it. The Gossams helped."

"You did well."

"Thank you, General."

"Why have you betrayed your oath?"

Dassyne gave him a sad smile that would have been at home on the Jedi girl's face. "Blood is stronger than ink, General, as we say on Murkhana," said Dassyne. "I had a choice between this government and my people. I would choose my people, every time."

"As is right," said Grievous. He'd chosen his people over the Banking Clan, just before the bombing. "Are you to subdue me?"

"Yes, if possible" said Dassyne. "But we both know I'm going to kill you instead."

"That would be smart of you," Grievous said. *Wait a second, why am I accepting defeat if I have a Jedi?* An idea came to mind, and he dropped his mental barrier, so that the Jedi could hear his thoughts. "Tell me how you locked me out of my own army's system."

"Still trying to get out of this?" asked the Koorivar. "You're only delaying the inevitable."

"Call it my dying request."

"We turned off the relay's computer," Dassyne said, gesturing to the machines around them. "We didn't have time to sever the connection, so I made a calculated risk. You're not the kind to stop and think things through."

Do it, girl! Turn the relay on! Grievous thought as loudly as he could. The girl shifted where she was hiding.

Which one? she mouthed back to him.

I don't know! Turn on all of them! You know what an 'on' switch looks like!

"You weren't wrong about me," Grievous said. "But your gamble has failed, Colonel Dassyne! Now!" Grievous yelled.

The Jedi girl extended her hands, and the activated switch on every computer flipped on. The entire room lit up with lights and screens and was filled with the whirring of cooling fans.

"How-?" gasped one of the Koorivar.

"That doesn't matter, kill him!" Dassyne ordered, drawing his pistol. A red bolt smacked Grievous between the eyes, and he threw himself backwards on instinct. Grievous spun the girl's lightsaber in the front of him, warding off the hail of fire long enough for him to take cover behind the same control panel the Jedi was behind.

"Did it work?" the girl asked.

"Yes!" Grievous said, cackling in glee. "You lose, Shu Mai!"

All across the city, the droid army rose from its dormancy as the activation signal reached it. Even in this room, the blue-marked pilot droids lifted their heads and sat up at their stations, glancing around at the shoot-out happening all around them.

All units, engage the unauthorized militants in the city! Spare those who surrender. The order went out to his ground forces. And to the awakening fleet in orbit, he sent orders too. *Disable the traitor warships, I want the enemy leadership alive!*

General, the super tactical droid in orbit immediately replied over their shared datalink, *the traitor fleet is too powerful to engage safely with non-lethal means. Chances of victory under your rules of engagement are slim. I predict their escape is imminent.*

Grievous growled, but noted with satisfaction that the Koorivar were under attack from all sides by the security droids in the tower. He sent out a quick revision to designate the city police as friendlies.

"I can't believe this worked," the girl said, wide-eyed. "I really, *really* thought we were finished!"

"Celebrate later," Grievous said. His communicator suddenly began chiming, and he answered it.

"Tuuk!" Grievous yelled through the hologram. "And Gunray too, isn't that a surprise."

The cyborg was horrifically damaged, armor dented and cracked and singed, and one of his legs was nearly out of commission. Gunray was amazed he was still going, but he shouldn't have been. It was Grievous, after all.

"General," Gunray said, "I see you've reactivated the droid army, just as we expected." In reality, they'd used a spy probe to track Grievous and his anonymous agent's approach to the Array, and informed Dassyne that the General had been making an approach from the ground, and not suicidal landspeeder flying assault.

"You will die like the rest!" raged Grievous. "There will be no mercy to traitors!"

"Ah, yes, the presumed treason," Tuuk said. "Captain Dofine can explain everything, General. Our apparent betrayal was illusory, you will find."

"Excuses will not save you!"

Gunray glanced at Tuuk, who didn't seem the slightest bit worried about Grievous's wrath. "In forty-five seconds the rest of my fleet will arrive in high orbit and trap the actual traitors here. So far, they suspect nothing of us."

The cyborg seethed, but he did so silently as he considered Tuuk's words.

"General," Gunray said, "forgive us for the deception, but it was necessary to catch Shu Mai and the others. Their insurrection is at an end. They cannot escape from here, and they will all pay the price for their treason."

"And you will not?" asked Grievous.

"Captain Dofine knows what we've done," said Gunray. "He will tell you the truth of our deeds."

Grievous snorted. "We'll see about that."

At that moment, the computers on the ship's bridge chimed. "Ah, my fleet has arrived," Tuuk said. "If you excuse us, General, we've got rebels to catch." Tuuk closed the line. "Do you think he'll figure out you didn't plan to help him until he escaped?"

"No one but us knows," Gunray said. "I trust you can keep a secret?"

"I have a feeling I'd end up in a gruesome accident if I don't," Tuuk chuckled.

"Our story is that I intended to betray the coup from the start. After this, I am retiring and never having anything to do with this war again." Gunray crossed his arms, and exhaled. "Dofine will back us up. I've known him for years."

"Let's hope," said Tuuk.

"They weren't lying," said Esera, as the sounds of gunfire retreated down the hall.

"I don't want to hear it," Grievous told her. His mental barrier was up again, she couldn't sense any intention in him now. "Dofine will tell me what really happened with those two."

Esera stood up, and made sure there was no one left to shoot them. Their only company now were the pilot droids, who just set up about their work as usual. She checked the information coming down from orbit. "Looks like a fleet really did just arrive. They're fighting the traitors right now."

"Hmm," Grievous rumbled, heaving himself to his feet. "I need to contact my forces across the galaxy. They must know what happened here."

"You should probably clean up, first," said Esera.

"Hah! I wear my scars with pride." The cyborg hobbled up to the terminal, and pushed her aside, though not roughly. "This is Grievous," he said to the screen. "Rumors of my capture have been greatly exaggerated. The coup has failed, the treacherous criminals are on the run and will soon be apprehended to face full and merciless judgment. There will be no negotiations or ceasefire! The war continues!"

The war continues, thought Esera, as Grievous sent his quick message across the stars. But would it have really ended if they'd both died here today? Or would it just have descended into chaos and warlordism as central authority of the Separatist military disintegrated?

Grievous summoned his flagship to return to orbit as soon as possible, and took the lift to the landing pad at the top of the comms tower. Esera followed him up, for lack of anything else to do. The cold wind bit at her, but the clouds had cleared and the late afternoon sun shined gold and orange on the snowy city.

"Dassyne's surrendered," Grievous told her, after his ear-antennae twitched. "It won't be long until the others follow. It's over."

"Good?" Esera wasn't sure why he was telling her this. An empty exhaustion was beginning to overtake her. Right now, nothing sounded better than some warm food and a place to sleep. "So... I get my asylum, right?" she asked.

"Of course," said Grievous. "You can even have citizenship, if you swear allegiance."

"I can't refuse such a generous offer," said Esera. She'd never get stopped at customs again, in Separatist space. *I could go home, to Stalimur...*

"You do realize you have saved the Confederacy, don't you?" asked the cyborg. There was a wry look on what little remained of his face. "A Jedi, savior of the Separatists. Ironic."

"I suppose I did, didn't I?" Esera put her hands on her ships, and looked out over the city. *I am responsible for ensuring this war continues for years more*, she thought. *Then it's my responsibility to help as many as I can, now.*

A thoughtful look came across Grievous's eyes, and he put a skeletal hand to the place his chin might have once been. "You were far less useless than I imagined. I admit I would be dead without your skills. You have tenacity and courage in the face of death, as well. And I may almost miss the little talks we had today."

Coming from Grievous, that must have been the highest praise imaginable. *Especially to a Jedi*, she thought. *Who would have imagined-*

A new thought intruded on her mind, then. An opportunity presented itself, she could feel it in the Force. This was a chance the universe would not offer again, a chance for her to actually do something meaningful, a chance to earn the trust of the galaxy's most powerful individual and use her influence for good. If it was her responsibility to help who she could, then was this not the best way to do that? And despite all the misgivings she had about this wild gamble, she took it.

"General, if my skills have served you well, perhaps they could continue to serve you well," Esera spoke. The look Grievous gave her was enough to shatter the confidence that had filled her just a moment ago. "I mean, uh, I know you hate me, but I know a lot about what's going on out there, and, um, you don't, and..."

"Bold move, girl," Grievous said, cutting through her stammering. "Offering your services to me, sworn enemy of the Jedi?" Esera withered under his gaze. Maybe that had been a monumentally stupid thing to say.

"Uh..." *What are you doing, Esera!?* she screamed at herself.

"But I do have need of those services," continued the cyborg. "And since you have offered them, it is too late to back out. As much as I despise the Jedi, you at least had the intelligence to realize how terrible they are. I could make use of someone with your abilities. I will make arrangements for you to come aboard my ship. There are a number of things I need done you would be well-suited for."

Esera was speechless, and could only nod. She suddenly became very nervous. *What have I gotten myself into now?* A Jedi knight like her? Not only helping, but working *for* General Grievous? How could this have happened? Esera just couldn't stop from digging deeper into the hole she'd been in since Shumavar. The Force truly did work in mysterious ways.

Author's bigger note: Well, here we are with a few hours left in 2018. Happy new year everyone, I guess. I finally finished this after months of being distracted by university. Hey, I'm a language student, most of my classes aren't even taught in English anymore. I think I only have one English-taught class left before I hopefully graduate in spring... So we'll see what else comes? For all I know I might be posting from somewhere outside of America in the future.

Anyways, this concludes the coup arc. Yes, it literally took me like two years to finish a single 24 hour series of events in this story. Incredible, isn't it? From here on out things will move faster. Assuming of course I write more, which I will, eventually. I won't insult you, my readers, I know I'm the flake of flakes and you know it too. So, until next time, and may 2019 be a year with more than two chapters.

Oh, by the way, I noticed a lot of punctuation and spelling errors in previous chapters, so I'll be fixing those... hopefully soon? Alright, that's all for real!

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